

## Pilgrimage Through the Watchtower

## Chapter 5: Increasing Doubts



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## Chapter 5: Increasing Doubts

By the summer of 1982, having weathered the five years of witnessing by "born-again" Christians and having been an active part of the Foothills congregation for two and a half years, I nevertheless found myself heading downhill spiritually. Again, as in the beginning, questions were surfacing. I still believed that our Watchtower doctrine was airtight, but I found myself again having trouble with the literature.

The material in our study articles was always extremely one-sided; always presented from the rigid, unflinching Watchtower perspective. I began to wonder whether this one-sided approach to our studies offered us any means by which to evaluate the validity of any opposing viewpoints. Were we not, in fact, strictly forbidden to entertain any viewpoints that might conflict with those of the Watchtower? The Watchtower's, and therefore our own purpose in our studies was always to simply prove ourselves right. How could we ever be fully assured of "the Truth" under these circumstances? I felt a bit off balance.

An example will illustrate the Watchtower approach to "the Truth." A couple of years following his baptism, my brother Steve, an intelligent and very studious person, began to have questions regarding the correctness of the Watchtower's teaching on the Trinity. How did he deal with this situation? Over a period of a few months, he compiled a several-hundred-page study on the subject. This study, then, served to quell his mind on the Trinity. The study, however, was composed solely of quotations from Watchtower publications! Quotations from reputable Trinitarian scholars were only cited as they happened to be contained in the quoted Watchtower material. There was no independently researched material in his study. This was the way we were taught to think: if we had a problem or a question, we were to look to our "mother" organization for security. Only "mother" could take care of us.

Our "spiritual food" was always served predigested by the "faithful and discreet slave." These men's interpretations of the Scriptures were always presented in the literature as irrefutable fact. This was so even though their viewpoints changed from time to time on various issues, such as on their understanding of the "superior authorities" of Romans 12, the acceptability of vaccinations, and the Witnesses' proper

conduct toward those who had disassociated themselves from the Organization. We were not allowed to question the Society on these or any other points of doctrine, but were taught only to "not run ahead of God's organization." I remember a Sunday morning Watchtower study in which the Organization was likened to a ship "tacking in the wind," changing course now and then, but making steady progress toward its final destination. "The light gets brighter and brighter..."

Also, after these two and a half years at the Foothills congregation, I began to see that I had perhaps been wrong in staying at Foothills for so long. I didn't fit well into any of the established cliques in the congregation, and finally decided that it was time to make a move. I began attending the Mesa congregation meetings, which were held at the same Kingdom Hall, and felt somewhat more at home there. But after another six months things were still not going well. I needed a stronger change. I was growing tired of my interior repair business, and that fall I decided to move on. I sold my business to a couple of "pioneer" sisters in the Mesa congregation and moved to San Diego, California. During my two years of operating Colorite, I had developed a new method for repairing cracked dashboards, and after much prayer and an exploratory motorcycle trip to the area, I was confident that I could make a living repairing dashboards in the San Diego area.

To my dismay I found myself becoming even more miserable in San Diego. I knew no one in the area and I dearly missed my friends in Colorado. Was this where God really wanted me? Why wasn't I happy here? The dashboard business was doing fairly well, I was living in one of the most desirable cities in the country, I was one of Jehovah's Witnesses, and yet still something wasn't right!

Late one November evening, toward the end of my first month in San Diego, I took a walk along the shore of Mission Beach. It was then that I finally reached my breaking point. Alone in the dark with the sand and the seashore, I knelt on the beach and poured my heart out to my God. "Jehovah," I prayed, my heart heavy with grief, "are you really there? Why do you never answer me when I pray? Don't you know that I've given the past six years of my life to you? Don't you know the humiliation I've gone through for you, the difficulties with my parents and friends, the rebukes from the people at the doors, the man with the scissors, the late-night studies? Jehovah, don't you see these things? Don't you care about me? Don't you love me? I've worked so hard for you these past six years, and I've received not one word of encouragement from you. Have I not sought first your

kingdom? Why have you given me no assurance that I'm all right with you? Jehovah, if you can, if you will, please help me!" Despairing within myself at my own lack of faith and trust in Jehovah, I threw myself upon His mercy. The next move, should there be one, was His to make.

A few days later I received a phone call from my Mom back in Hyde Park. During our conversation, she happened to mention that one of the salespeople at Taylor Manufacturing in Poughkeepsie was leaving the company. I expressed interest in the vacant position, and a few days later my Dad, vice president and sales manager of Taylor, called me back. After talking with me for awhile, my Dad agreed to discuss the possibility of my filling the spot with the others at the company.

While waiting for my Dad's response, life in San Diego was becoming unbearable. I soon packed up and moved to Denver, and stayed there with Steve (the friend who had sold Colorite to me) and his family, for a couple of weeks. Then came my Dad's response. A job offer! After a couple of days of meditation and prayer, I accepted. Could this be Jehovah's answer to my San Diego plea? I thought so. Back in New York I would have a new job, and would be part of the strong Hyde Park congregation. My brother Steve would be there, too, having recently been transferred from Brooklyn Bethel to Watchtower Farm in Wallkill, as would be another fifteen or twenty strong "Farm brothers," most of whom I already knew from my previous years in Hyde Park. Things were indeed looking up! I made the move back to New York in December of 1983, full of anticipation.

Unfortunately, though, hope for a quick spiritual renewal was dashed soon after my arrival in Hyde Park. The brothers and sisters in the congregation were wonderful, and it was good to be back together with Steve again, but still not all was going smoothly for me. The nagging questions that I had had about the Society's indoctrination methods were still there, and in addition, I began feeling strangely ill at ease with some of the Society's doctrinal stances. By this time I had read the New World Translation from cover to cover four times, and had especially come to love the "Greek Scriptures," the New Testament. As I continued in my daily study and Bible reading, I began to see that the early Christians placed more emphasis upon the person of Jesus than we did as Jehovah's Witnesses. To make sure that this was in fact the case, I made some comparisons and found that the ratio of the use of Jehovah's name to the use of Jesus' name in the Watchtower literature was ten times that of the ratio in the New Testament (I still thought the New World Translation Committee was correct in inserting the name "Jehovah" 273 times in their

New Testament). At the same time I discovered that the Watchtower literature placed 27 times more emphasis on preaching than does the New Testament.

Another point that bothered me: The Society had always extolled its 6% annual rate of increase as strong evidence of Jehovah's blessing on the Organization. But was this necessarily so? Now in sales, I found myself even so bold as to look at the Watchtower Society from a business standpoint. Here I saw a corporation, manufacturing its product (printed materials) with virtually free labor, and distributing it worldwide via three million zealous salespeople who worked for free! With so many active recruiters, and an income of two million dollars per week from the sale of magazines alone, was a 6% yearly increase such a strong evidence of God's blessing? This didn't seem to be a necessary conclusion.

I began to have concerns about the general selfishness of Watchtower doctrine. By this time I had read quite a number of the Society's "deeper" books, such as "Babylon the Great Has Fallen" and "The Finished Mystery," expositions of Revelation, and "The Nations Shall Know that I Am Jehovah," an exposition of Ezekiel. In these books in particular I found that the Watchtower interpretations of prophecy were often extremely far-fetched, always showing their fulfillments in "God's modern-day organization," Jehovah's Witnesses. My mind would often go back to a study that we had had several years earlier, in the "God's Kingdom of a Thousand Years Has Approached" book, in which Paul's vision, recorded in chapter 12 of 2 Corinthians, was discussed. According to the Society, when Paul was caught up to the third heaven, into Paradise, and heard "unutterable words, which are not lawful for a man to speak (NWT)," he was shown the "spiritual paradise," the modern-day estate of Jehovah's Witnesses on earth! Of this he was not allowed to speak! I never could accept this ridiculous interpretation. Why, I thought, couldn't the Society just let Paul have a vision from God that concerned things more wonderful than we can know right now? Why drag the Organization into it?

I began to see Watchtower selfishness also in our view of other people, especially Christian people. According to the Watchtower, of all those who heard the "good news of Jehovah's established (since 1914) kingdom" preached by Jehovah's Witnesses, not one would be saved but those who responded favorably to this teaching. How different from the first-century disciples who simply "believed on the Lord Jesus" (Acts 16:31) for salvation!

As a member of the "great crowd," I was taught that the "Christian Greek Scriptures" were not written to me; that they applied directly only to the "144,000." Taking this teaching to

heart made reading the "Greek Scriptures" extremely difficult. Very little applied to me directly, and I had to rely upon the Organization to sort out which Scriptures did and which did not apply to me. I was not in the "new covenant" by virtue of Christ's blood, and I knew by personal experience that I didn't have the same kind of personal relationship with Christ as did the first-century disciples. From the Society's viewpoint, I was exactly where I was supposed to be. But then, what if, God forbid, the Society was wrong? I knew I wasn't a first-century-type Christian. I hadn't been born again. I had no "heavenly hope."

In my reading of the Scriptures I began to see that the New Testament was Christ-intensive, whereas the Watchtower was Christ-passive. According to the Watchtower, Jesus, in coming to earth and dying for Adam's sin, had done his job, now it was up to us to do ours. Somehow, this "lack of Jesus" at the Kingdom Hall began to bother me more than anything else. In thinking about this one meeting night at the Hall, I opened to the index of our new songbook, "Sing Praises to Jehovah," and discovered that only 7 of our 225 songs were about Jesus. Only three percent!<sup>84</sup> Was something out of balance here?

I eventually began to wonder also about Watchtower chronology, particularly the teaching that Christ had returned invisibly in the year 1914. Our chronology was based on the idea that Jerusalem was taken into Babylonian captivity by Nebuchadnezzar in the year 607 B.C.E., but I had heard from my brother Steve, among others, that most scholars set the date twenty years later, at 587 B.C.E. Also, Scripture verses such as "as the lightning shines from one part of the sky to the other part of the sky, so will the coming of the Son of Man be (Matt 24:27)" and "every eye will see him (Rev 1:7)" began to trouble me.

With these questions and others growing in my mind, my "field service" was suffering. I remember approaching a house in Hyde Park with my brother Steve, and thinking to myself, "How can I teach these people that Jesus came invisibly in 1914 when I'm not absolutely sure of it myself?" James 3:1 haunted me: "not many of you, brethren, should become teachers, for we shall incur stricter judgment."

Of course, I kept all of these questions and doubts to myself, as do all faithful Jehovah's Witnesses. I had to put up a front of "spirituality" so as not to "stumble" my brothers with these things. In addition to this was the terrible fear of disfellowshipping, the punishment for those who entertain ideas contrary to Watchtower teaching.

Finally, these inner conflicts became too much to bear. At my

request, Bob and Jamie, two elders of the Hyde Park congregation, and my brother Steve, met with me in Steve's room at the Farm. After asking questions and explaining my reservations to the elders, they gave me their startling response: "We can't answer your questions," they said. You're an intelligent individual, and quite frankly, you know the Truth as well as we do. We can't furnish you with anything that you haven't already received from the Society. We're afraid you're on your own; you're going to have to figure these things out for yourself."

Now I was in a terrible spot! I had apparently exhausted the Society's teachings on all major points of doctrine and was still left hanging. What to do now?

A week or so later, Steve and I were in a Christian bookstore. I happened to pick up "The Companion Bible" and was leafing through it. "That's supposed to be a pretty good Bible," Steve said. "The Society quotes from it sometimes." That was all the encouragement I needed! The Bible was full of notes, and I thought that with caution, of course, these notes might help me out of my situation. I bought it, brought it home, and began reading.

Also about this time, my brother Brad had invited Jon, his pastor, to get together with me to debate the Trinity. I heartily agreed to the discussion, figuring that it would be good for Brad to see his pastor floundering in a futile attempt to defend the "Babylonish" Trinity. We got together twice, the first time with just Brad, Jon and me present, the second time with Steve joining us. For me, the meetings accomplished two unexpected things. First, I saw that for some people the Trinity doctrine is not just something that Christendom had adopted from Babylonian paganism without thought, but was indeed a doctrine that could be admirably defended from Scripture. Previous to these meetings, I was of the opinion, as are most Jehovah's Witnesses, that belief in the Trinity was just pure stupidity. After this pastor's articulate defense, however, I could no longer say that. Jon was a man, a born-again Christian man, who had *reasons* for believing in the Trinity. Second, the pastor said something in passing, a novel idea for me, that somehow managed to wedge itself into my heart, never to be removed. I was explaining to the pastor how arrogant it was for a "Christian" to say that he "is saved," as though no matter what he did in his life, he would remain saved. "How much more arrogant," Jon responded, "to say that we need to add to the work of Christ, as though what He did on the cross was not sufficient for us."

Finally, with all these questions still going unanswered, and with tremendous pressure to conform to Watchtower doctrine on the one hand, and "born-again" Christians witnessing to



me on the other, I finally came to the point where I had to make what was, for a Jehovah's Witnesses, a very radical decision. I decided to undergo a very thorough, objective, personal study of the Bible without the aid of Watchtower publications. My conviction was that if the Watchtower Society was in fact God's organization, which I still believed it was, that Jehovah God Himself would show this to me plainly through an honest, objective study of His Word.

I made my decision known to Steve, who promptly informed the Hyde Park elders. That Sunday at the Kingdom Hall, Bob, one of the elders with whom I'd met at the Farm, asked me to join him out in his car in the parking lot. In his car he questioned me as to what I was planning to do, and I freely explained it to him. He was, after all, the one who had told me that I'd have to answer my questions for myself. "I can't forbid your doing the study, Kevin," he said, "but for the sake of all of us, take care of it quickly."

So that afternoon commenced the most arduous, the most difficult period of my young life. For the next five months I searched the Scriptures for from four to fourteen hours a day, my eternal destiny all the while hanging in the balance.

#### Endnotes:

84. The Watchtower is evidently quite proud of this fact. In a recent Watchtower book, "Revelation-Its Grand Climax at Hand!," on page 36 is found this statement: "In the songbook produced by Jehovah's people in 1905, there were twice as many songs praising Jesus as there were songs praising Jehovah God...But in the latest songbook of 1984, Jehovah is honored by four times as many songs as is Jesus."

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